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ABSTRACT

Frequently administrators must spend time producing documents and reports, though theoretically they are supposed to use information to create better educational environments and experiences for students. By using the personal computer as a tool for tasks and analyses that, before the computer, used to take days, administrators will have time to utilize their higher order thinking skills--evaluation, conclusion, and application. The specific administrative areas that a computer can handle better than a person include ordinary typing tasks, student and personnel information processing, and financial recording and planning. Word processing programs and database programs will expedite these tasks. Listed are 10 programs, primarily ones that run on the Apple IIe or Apple IIc systems, and the sample tasks shown as part of the presentation. (MLF)

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Administrative Uses of Computers in the Elementary Schools
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For most of us the pace of life is not lessening, just accelerating; leaving us with the feeling that we are struggling every minute to keep up. This is spoken particularly from the vantage point of an elementary school administrator who has experienced the increasing demands that life at the latter end of the 20th century imposes. Quality is definitely in the crosshairs of all of our sights and yet, pulling the trigger and hitting the mark squarely on target is a great challenge. There just doesn't seem to be enough time to prepare and accomplish all the tasks that are expected. Accurate record keeping is essential in this law-suit oriented society and yet competent educators are left wondering where they will find time to invest in developing their true role...instructional leader...curriculum mentor...spiritual/philosophical guardian. Call it what you will, we administrators are destined to be more than glorified secretaries.

This is not to take away from the remarkable role that the secretary plays in the efficient running of the school. Rather, it is meant to recall that theoretically, the principal is supposed to use information to create better educational environments and experiences. As noted, all too often administrators are handicapped in their visionary efforts because they must produce documents, statistics, reports etc.

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Solutions to this dilemma? Don't expect miracles but things can improve. Just like dieting, though, progress takes time, discipline and dedication. Anyone who suggests "get-thin or rich-quick" solutions is a not telling the honest truth. Even though science has provided the personal computer as a tool to expedite chores, it must be remembered that the computer is only as efficient as the operator. After all, nothing can happen unless someone first turns the machine on! Then, you have to be willing to interact with it, make mistakes, read literature, ask questions or take courses or workshops. It can be done all by yourself (by the book) or it can be done socially, taking a workshop. The end is essentially the same. Time will be invested, you will be disciplined to a certain way of "talking" to your computer, and, if you persevere for a period of time, you will reap long-term creative, productive rewards. Tasks and analysis that used to take days will take only hours. You will be able to easily utilize the higher orders of thinking skills - evaluation, conclusion, application. These are definitely benefits worth working and waiting for!

The specific administrative areas that a computer can handle better than humans in elementary administration include ordinary typing tasks, student and personnel information processing, and financial recording and planning.

Ask yourself these questions:

-Do you retype things monthly, annually? (Permission slips, form letters, class lists)

-Do you have large projects that need revision frequently or periodically? (Handbooks, professional evaluation documents, phone lists)

-Do you have to do a lot of hand calculation work with statistics? (Annual budget, monthly accounting)

-Would you like to be able to ask questions about which students fit certain criteria and be able to have an answer in seconds?

It would be hard to imagine any elementary school administrator that could not answer "yes" to these questions. Even if a secretary now handles these tasks, time efficiency, productivity and accuracy could be increased if computers were enlisted as assistants. All that needs to be done is to slip an appropriate program into the computer's disk drive. It will then acquire certain capabilities and skills which are inherent in the program.

An analogy that explains the relation between a computer and a program is to think of a very talented dramatic artist as the computer. Programs are like scripts. The artist assumes the personality of the character in the script. When scripts are changed - so does the artist's personality portrayal and characteristics. Similarly, a computer assumes the "characteristics" of the program that is inserted into its disk drive. When programs are changed, so are the behaviors of the computer.

For example, putting in a word processing program makes the computer into a super typewriter. A new form can be typed into the computer and saved for future, repeated use, thereby saving valuable time. Entire electronic files can be created and stored on separate disks. Annual programs, such as registrations, which typically include a variety of documents can be stored, retrieved, updated and freshly printed each year at the appropriate time. This dramatically reduces repetitve typing. Other projects such as faculty, parent and student handbooks, newsletters and even songs for liturgies can be efficiently handled by a word processing program.

Data base programs make the computer perform very diffently from word processing programs. Essentially, data base programs act as very large index card files. Many categories or "fields" of information can be simultaneously recorded about people or objects. Each person or object has a separate "card" or screen on them. These electronic cards can then be sorted and/or searched to meet certain criteria and reports and lists can be generated. Files are usually very unique. Some files are created to manage audio-visual inventories whereas others track names, addresses, phone numbers etc. for students, faculty, alumni, or benefactors. Data base programs frequently include the added feature of being able to produce mailing labels and sometimes have "mail merge" capability which creates customized form letters. Pre-organized data base programs exist for student data and even recipe information which can be helpful if you have to run your own cafeteria. Data base programs are wonderful time savers for recording volunteer responses as they come in to the school office. This volunteer information can be sorted into grades or activities in a matter of seconds and can provide coordinators with print outs of names, phones and information in a fraction of the time that it would take to do by hand.

Another use of data base programs is in the area of financial management. Fields can be created to record check amounts, numbers, vendors, budget categories and comments. The computer will then be able to sort (and usually sum!) these fields, providing the administrator with invaluable information which can be utilized in the preparation of annual budgets and financial reports. The expenses and revenues concerned with a specific project or activity can be isolated from the total file, if desired. School, parent and student organization accounts can all be kept this way.

Spreadsheet programs are also extremely useful in financial management. The tasks that take hours to calculate take seconds using a spreadsheet. The key to making a spreadsheet operative is the ability to relate one location to another. More and more this is becoming as simple as highlighting the involved locations and supplying the appropriate mathematical symbol. From then on, anything put in those locations will perform the function stipulated. Annual budget projections can be created, revised and explored for alternative arrangements with no fear of forgetting to change a subtotal or component figure.

Don't be overwhelmed. The programs referred to do not need a new M.A. or a Ph. D. to operate. Although they are well within a secretary's capabilities, they fall in most administrators' areas of responsibility and thus should be learned by the administrator as well as the secretary. (It is always best if at least two people know how to operate the computer.)

Many programs are available. The key is to get started. Once involved, a good administrator - like a good teacher - will adapt the material to his/her own style and needs. Some frequently heard word processing program names are Applewriter, WordPerfect, PFS Write and Wordstar. Data base programs include TeloSchool, PFS File, PFS Report. Some spreadsheets are VisiCalc, FlashCalc, PractiCalc and Magicalc. Appleworks is an integrated program which means that it contains all three types of programs: a word processor, a data base and a spreadsheet.

It is impossible in the time available today to show all the above-mentioned programs here. It is only possible to show one or at most two in each area. It must be remembered that this is not an exhaustive list. Since programs vary in capabilities, cost and operating styles the best thing to do after today is to talk to a number of people who are using a computer in their school office. Beware of only taking the advice of your friendly software dealer. What is good for businesses is not necessarily good for elementary school administration. Try to preview a program in operation in a school first before you go out and purchase it.

The programs that I am about to show are tried and true in elementary schools of up to 800 students and cover the three major areas of word processing, data base and spreadsheet applications. They are primarily ones that will run on the Apple //e or //c systems. I will briefly show similar programs for the Apple Macintosh computer which, although easier to use and more powerful than the //e and //c systems, suffers from a comparative dearth of administrative software. This is changing daily, however, and the Macintosh should be considered as a viable option and perhaps a preference for the office of the future because of its sophisticated qualities.

Program Demonstrated	Sample tasks shown
AppleWriter //	Newsletter (Desktop Publishing) Faculty/Parent/Student Handbook School Forms - Field trip Correspondence
AppleWorks (Word Processing)	[Same as AppleWriter //]
AppleWorks (Data Base)	Calendar Audio-Visual Inventory Library Management Parent/Student Resource List Mailing labels Annual ordering Check register/Monthly Accounting
TeloSchool	Student Management System
VisiCalc	(See AppleWorks Spreadsheet)
FlashCalc	(See AppleWorks Spreadsheet)
AppleWorks (Spreadsheet)	Annual budgeting Monthly accounting Grading
Classmate	Grading
MacWrite	(See AppleWriter above)
Business Filevision	Student Management System Equipment Inventory

This presentation is meant as an encouragement and an overview of what is administratively possible with computers. Remember that an initial investment of time, discipline and dedication is required but after that, the resultant accomplishments will act as a self-priming pump. The benefits of these programs include enabling administrators to be more effective and efficient and therefore be persons who have quality time to devote to being present to the people with, and to whom they minister. I hope I have illustrated in some way that through the gift of computer science, administrators can be freed to work on the more truly human aspects of their jobs.

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